Key Organizational Challenges to Social Media in Emergency Management:
Better Practices to Address Them

Key Organizational Challenges	Better Practices to Address Challenges

Leadership Buy-in and Organizational Culture
Fear and distrust of what is new or not familiar, questions about the reliability of information, and ability to verify what is provided by social media; May be fear of its misuse or abuse making them look bad.
	• Explain the significant benefits and the small risks of its use.
	• Acknowledge that those unfamiliar with social media may find its use uncomfortable or intimidating. These anxieties are similar to those that accompanied the introduction of the Internet, email and web use. Review how central the use of the Internet, email and web tools have become in business.
	• Emphasize the downside of not being included in the public conversation already occurring;
	   o Do you want the public discussing your emergency or disaster without you?
	   o Don't you want to know what they are saying (about you)?
	   o Do you know how to participate and respond?
	• Show examples of other government users and their experiences
	• Suggest starting slowly, experimenting with a few tools, and adapting to ever-changing situations and technologies

Organizational Capability IT staff may not be familiar with enterprise deployment of social media or lack the infrastructure capacity to accommodate its use, especially high-definition or high-bandwidth applications such as images and streaming audio or video. Emergency management workforce may be unfamiliar with it or might lack the skills required to use it effectively.	• Develop a support structure, including human resources who will manage the accounts with guidelines (policies and procedures when necessary), and training in their use at all levels. • Have those who are familiar with those platforms explain the terms and ways they are used so that all staff can communicate effectively. • Pair staff who understand the platforms with those less familiar to bridge the knowledge gap.
Sustainability (competition for resources, skills, time) With emergency service organizations working with lean resources and expected to do more with less, there is more competition for shrinking staff and their time. Emergency response staff are already overloaded with their daily responsibilities and training in emergency protocols and other IT systems.	• Be creative in using current staff to enhance what you want to do and cross train staff on the different platforms used. • Identify reliable volunteer pools within the community with the requisite skills and commitment for cooperation in areas of social media use such as monitoring and coordinating communication.
Security Policies and Restrictions Related to IT Systems IT staff may perceive social media platforms as potential security risks and guidelines for allowing their use and management may not have kept pace with the current state of web technology.	• Use social media on computer systems that are off the organization's main computer network and do not link it with any internal systems. • Work with the IT staff to identify areas of concern and work together to problem solve. • Develop guidelines on social media use with IT staff.
Privacy of Personal Information Legal staff and public citizens advocates may have concerns about citizens' privacy and personal information, how it will be handled, tracked, stored, and used. **Public Records Retention Requirements** Legal records retention requirements for archiving communications at State and Federal level can damper use of these tools. Many locales are not staffed to do this or the staff they have are not familiar with the technologies. Changes in legal requirements have been outpaced by adaptation of social media.*	• Ensure legal language is included where needed. Make sure that promises are kept. • Establish practical and transparent reporting and analysis processes, and track progress to measure program success. • Make sure that you have staff who can monitor your social media sites on a steady basis using an aggregating tool or other regular update. • As above under organizational capacity, ensure that staff are cross trained on platforms and guidelines for use.

* Quote from Tom Olshanski, Director of External Affairs at the U.S. Fire Administration.

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